

# Circuit court location continued

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He continued explaining the implications for the location of a particular item that was previously determined to be set in Heppner but now appeared to be moved to Boardman. Tom voiced his direct appeal to Commissioner Sykes based on the potential community preference from south Morrow County regarding the reconsideration of the decision. "After the June 5th BOC meeting I pretty much forgot about it cause they said its gonna be in the Heppner area period, and all of the sudden it comes out 'oh my gosh its gonna be in Boardman, that decision has been made' well when was that on the docket?" Tom noted, expressing his surprise and concern over the sudden change in plans.

Kane Sweeney shared his insights through Zoom, reflecting on his extensive experience with the Oregon Judicial Department in both Morrow and Umatilla counties.

Sweeney expressed his deep personal connection to the issue, underscored by his family's involvement and his own professional journey, saying, "I've had a personal connection to this for a while, obviously my dad has spoken, my mom has spoken, but I'm employed by OJD." He further elaborated on the challenges faced due to limited space and security concerns in the existing facilities, highlighting that "One of the biggest reasons why we didn't have jury trials was, of course, the issue with the amount of space, the jury room is really small."

He continued by emphasizing the security issues that burdened court staff, explaining, "The biggest issue that we felt as court staff who worked there, was the issue of security. It was near impossible to have an in-custody defendant there; you needed deputies, multiple, to come down." Sweeney also pointed out the logistical hurdles, including the necessity of a portable metal detector each time court convened.

Kane Sweeney expressed reservations about the implications of constructing the new annex in Boardman, intended to only hold civil trials. He speculated about the potential strain on Heppner's judicial operations, stating, "It's gonna put Heppner in a very tough spot if there is no courthouse—especially nowadays because even the judges prefer not to drive out to Heppner, and they just take their hearings via Zoom."

As he painted a scenario where Heppner might be sidelined in favor of a more secure and equipped facility in Boardman, the floor was taken from him as he reached the three-minute speaking limit.

Local Cam Sweeney seized the opportunity to express his views on the shifting responsibilities and ownership of recent local decisions. Addressing those gathered, Sweeney earnestly remarked, "It wasn't Judge Hill, I mean I hate that he did that and it's a bunch of BS but, it was our own citizens of Heppner that has pushed

this to Boardman. We did it to ourselves; we kept our mouths shut. A lot of people didn't like the location, I wouldn't have picked that location either. I thought it would be great in here. But I didn't go to Facebook, I didn't go attacking saying some of the horrible stuff that was said to Dave. We did it to ourselves."

Reflecting on past community responses to new projects like the OHV park and Community Counseling, Sweeney pointed out the contradiction in public reactions, "When the OHV park was coming, you should have heard people, there was a meeting at the parish hall, and people were screaming and yelling. We've all been civil tonight and look at the OHV park; it's been great for us. And then when Community Counseling came along, people were talking about 'they're gonna be r\*ping people!' I mean horrible, disgusting things, and all these things being said and I guess what, we've got it, and we have all these people who are employed."

In response to a concern raised by another community member about how to rectify the inflicted situations, Sweeney offered a pointed reflection, "I'm thinking it's a little too late. I just hope we've learned. And you know Dave, I applaud you, you have done a great job. But Drago and those guys, it's like winning a football game and then giving the trophy back. They didn't get recalled - we're not gonna be the county seat anymore, and we've done it to ourselves. And shame on people who have done it."

Al Osmin, a member of the public, raised a concern about the upcoming election, questioning whether the issue could be revisited depending on the outcome. "Roy Drago has a runoff with Gus Peterson in November, if Gus Peterson happens to win, can this be brought up again?" Osmin inquired.

In response, DA Justin Nelson addressed a separate but related concern regarding the ongoing environmental studies at the Boardman site, suggesting that the results might impact the feasibility of the relocation. Nelson clarified, "I can look back but -for what the exact wording was but I recall it was to 'move forward' with that location, it was not like 'it shall be here' because anything can happen."

Further clarification came when another member of the public, Amy Kollman, questioned who holds the authority over interpreting the statutes governing courthouse locations. She was informed by Kuhn, that according to the Oregon statute, court shall primarily be held in Milton Freewater, Pendleton, Hermiston, and Heppner, with no other locations mentioned. However, Kuhn elaborated that after the Judge Hill contacted the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court regarding the possibility of relocating the courthouse, an open avenue for reevaluation by county commissioners was suggested based on statutory allowances granted to

the chief justice. "I think Judge Hill interpreted it as move the main courthouse to Boardman," Kuhn elaborated.

Sykes revealed the challenges faced in the initial plan to place the facility at the Mill site. He stated, "We had that thing corralled in Heppner, and I was trying to lock that thing down and get the deal done, and that site was ready to go. The Geotech's were done on it-the architects had looked it over, the chief justice came, and I took her out there, she said, 'this'll work great' and then all heck broke loose. I was accused I was gonna get kids killed if it was put there."

Corey Sweeney added that the project was almost finalized before complications arose due to a letter, explaining that "we were right at the finish line, and then that letter as a last-ditch effort." Continuing, he expressed that alternatives like Hager Park did not appease Judge Hill, who rejected all options, "everything we gave out there was squashed, squashed, and squashed."

The letter, according to Sykes, widened the scope for relocation beyond city limits, a move he initially feared. "And that was my fear when I talked, 'don't let this thing out of city limits because you don't know what's gonna happen'," stated Sykes.

Public attendees also voiced their concerns. Sheryll Bates expressed disappointment over a perceived shift in commitment, recalling that Drago had promised to keep the location in Heppner during a candidate's forum. "A very big disappointment—when he made that comment he made there, it kept his job," she added.

Janet Greenup sharply criticized the behind-the-scenes decisions, deeming the "backroom politics" as "unacceptable for this community."

Further action was suggested by Amy Kollman who inquired if organizing another meeting with all commissioners and Judge Hill might be feasible. Sweeney responded, advising that Judge Hill should not be involved in the next phase. He proposed, "It would be nice for them to hear, not to be attacked but to work with them, as a chance to say we're all on the same page here, you're listening to the wrong person, you have been manipulated by Judge Hill and his antics-"

Amy Kollman emphasized the need for civil discourse, stressing cooperation with local officials. "People need to understand, if they're here you cannot attack them, we need to work with them. We need to get them on our side and figure out a way to work through this," Kollman asserted, highlighting the importance of working collaboratively rather than being confrontational.

Cam Sweeney shared a recent exchange he had with Commissioner Drago, underscoring the disturbing nature of some criticisms aimed at public officials. According to Sweeney, he had come to Drago say-

ing he did not approve of the court house decision and Dragos response was, "You know what I'm not happy about, one of your people coming up to me and saying, 'hey by getting this courthouse here you're probably gonna get my grandkid r\*ped' -" Sweeney recounted Drago's response, with both agreeing that distancing oneself from such hostility was a necessary step.

Kollman also spoke about the personal cost of standing up for one's beliefs, acknowledging the likelihood of facing opposition. "When you stand for what you believe to be right, you're generally gonna be the one to be attacked. That's the world we live in right now, and it's really sad but it is what it is," Kollman remarked. She further noted that those who resort to attacking officials do not represent the community's values, urging residents to show their true character through respectful engagement.

Amidst these discussions, a member of the public inquired about the procedure to be included on the Board of County Commissioners (BOC) agenda. Commissioner Sykes responded by advising the individual to send an email specifying the desired date, the reason for the request, and who would be leading the agenda item.

Corey Sweeney expressed concern over Heppner's progressive decline and its impact on the local community. "Heppner is shrinking, and it has been shrinking for over 20 years. We cannot afford to lose anything. And those commissioners, no matter how much you like them or dislike them, they do have the county's best interest; they do care about south county people -and I do believe they will listen and support us and the county and not support Judge Hill," Sweeney asserted, emphasizing the importance of local representation.

In response to a query from a member of the public about the adaptability of the meeting agenda, Commissioner Sykes clarified that the commission's response would hinge on the specificity of the request. He suggested stating in the email exactly what they wanted to discuss.

Jerry Gentry, a local resident, also spoke up, indicating other potential developmental projects that could be viable for the fairground's location despite the looming judicial decisions stating that even if the circuit court doesn't go to the fairgrounds there are still other projects potential that can be placed there.

The discussion culminated with plans to present their concerns at the Board of Commissioners (BOC) meeting scheduled for October 2nd, with hopes of rallying public support through letters and a united stance. Commissioner Sykes received gratitude from Sweeney for his advocacy of Heppner, while Cody High praised Mayor Sweeney's continuous efforts in championing Heppner's needs since assuming office.

# Commission sets 2025 Big Game Hunting Regulations

**THE DALLES, Ore.**—September 13, 2024 The Fish and Wildlife Commission adopted 2025 Big Game Hunting Regulations today at their meeting in The Dalles.

The Commission first heard staff testimony regarding the population status of Oregon's game mammals, most of which are stable to increasing. No major changes were proposed or made to 2025 big game regulations beyond season date changes reflecting calendar date shifts and minor changes to tag numbers. Beginning in 2025, it will be more convenient to visit ODFW wildlife areas as visitors will be able to display their ODFW ID number in the window of their vehicle as proof of permit, rather than needing to print the permit.

Much of the public comment and testimony about the regulations focused on spring bear hunting, with thousands of emailed comments received and about 30 people testifying for and against. The Commission did not make any major changes to spring bear hunt structure, approving the staff proposal for a small increase in tags (2 percent) and a new bear hunt for youth hunters. Oregon's current bear population is estimated to be approximately 44,000 bears of all age classes.

The Commission also took the following actions today:

**Commercial Dungeness Crab Regulations:** Adopted line color and marking requirements

to help identify gear involved in marine life entanglements, which are part of ODFW and the industry's progress toward developing a Conservation Plan and Incidental Take Permit application to address marine life entanglements. The Commission adopted staff recommendations but modified the proposed rules to delay the line marking requirements for surface gear by one year (until Dec. 1, 2026). The rules adopted today also revised the Tri-State pre-season testing protocol and modified rules related to the removal of derelict crab pots by contracted vessels and electronic monitoring requirements for crab vessels to transit closed areas.

**Access & Habitat Project Funding:** Approved funding to open private land to hunting by renewing several access areas and increasing acreage in the Jackson Travel Management Area.

The Commission delegated authority to ODFW's Director to issue proposed orders authorized under Oregon's fish passage laws that are codified in ORS 509.585 through ORS 509.910.

Finally, the Commission heard an update on progress implementing the 3-Year Action Plan for Beaver Modified Landscapes, complimenting ODFW staff on progress to date. The Plan seeks to accelerate the restoration of American beaver habitat and beaver-modified habitat at the landscape-scale in Oregon.

## ATTENTION HUNTERS!!

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